



**MILWAUKEE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Opposition to Assembly Bill 44 - Prohibiting the Milwaukee Public Schools from Imposing Residency Requirements on Teachers

Milwaukee Public Schools opposes Assembly Bill 44, which would abolish MPS's residency requirements for teachers.

The MPS residency requirement implicates a wide number of policy considerations that are preeminently local in nature. MPS respectfully submits that such issues should properly be left in the hands of locally elected school directors who are closely in touch with the issues and directly accountable to taxpayers in the City of Milwaukee. This bill would effectively divest the MPS Board, and the Milwaukee electorate, of any say over a matter that has profound implications for MPS, the City, and everyone living in the City. Some of these implications are worth noting.

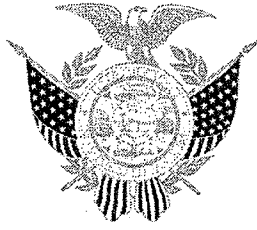
The experience of similarly sized Midwestern cities that do not have teacher residency requirements, a poll of MTEA teachers taken in the mid-1990s, and MPS's own experience with teachers who were not subject to the residency policy in earlier years, all suggest a very strong likelihood that a significant number of the teachers employed by MPS would move out of the City of Milwaukee if the residency requirement is eliminated. The potential loss of teacher/residents through elimination of the residency requirement would exacerbate declining population, employment and income trends. MPS as a whole is struggling financially—it has eliminated approximately 1000 positions over the past five years in an attempt to cope with its financial difficulties and is planning for the likely elimination of more positions in the upcoming school year. An exodus of teachers from the City to the suburbs and beyond will only amplify these problems. City of Milwaukee employment and income trends that are already poor as compared with the surrounding metropolitan area, will be exacerbated by this bill's provisions as well.

Perhaps most importantly, elimination of residency for teachers would significantly increase the likelihood that other groups (all employees working for MPS must reside in the City) could successfully eliminate residency requirements. If rates of migration out of the City by other groups even marginally approximated levels likely to occur with teachers, all of the adverse effects upon MPS and possibly the City noted in the foregoing would be significantly enhanced.

An argument put forward in favor of eliminating residency is that it precludes MPS from "attracting and retaining" good teachers. This argument folds under minimal scrutiny. First, MPS is having no difficulty hiring teachers except in areas that all large and many small districts struggle with such as special education; in fact, the number of teachers hired per year is down considerably as compared with five or ten years ago. When circumstances allow for it, MPS recruits nationally for teachers. There are a great many highly qualified teachers graduating from colleges locally and nationally and many of these are eager to accept the challenges of working in a large urban school district. Second, very few teachers give residency as a reason for leaving MPS: residency simply is not a significant problem with respect to attracting or retaining good teachers. Third, MPS teacher turnover rates compare very favorably with national turnover rates, and are comparable with turnover rates for large urban areas that do not have residency requirements. These facts all support a single conclusion: if the MPS residency rule were abolished, the impact upon recruitment and retention would be minimal.

The challenges posed to recruiting the best teachers for MPS, similar to those faced by other large urban school districts, are currently being studied and addressed. The elimination of the district's residency requirement, which will drive down the city's property value and inevitably redirect an increasing amount of state aid to MPS, does not provide the solution for those challenges.

For all of the above reasons MPS urges the committee to reject AB 44.



MILWAUKEE COMMON COUNCIL

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April 7, 2011

Assembly Committee on Education
Representative Steve Kestell, Chair
PO Box 8952
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Members of the Assembly Education Committee:

We are opposed to Assembly Bill 44 and the provision in the biennial budget that would repeal the residency requirement for teachers employed by Milwaukee Public Schools. Before reversing decades of employment policy here in our city and school system, we urge all state lawmakers to consider three fundamental points: 1) home rule / local control 2) the right of our taxpayers to receive financial concessions and fiscal relief in exchange for such a policy 3) the long-term economic impact on our homeowners and tax base.

The residency requirement – along with many other conditions of employment – is clearly a decision for local employers to make. Our state government should not be involved at all, and it is difficult to understand why representatives of faraway districts would have any opinion or stake in the matter. The U.S Supreme Court has upheld the legality of city residency requirements, and as locally elected legislative representatives, we are in the best position to determine the conditions and characteristics of employment for our employees. If our requirements are preventing us from attracting the best and brightest candidates, our constituents will tell us before they tell you, and they have not. If exceptions ever do become necessary, local officials are best positioned to implement such policies at the municipal level.

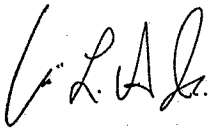
It is also important to remember that MPS residency was instituted in the context of collective bargaining. During intense negotiations over three decades ago, taxpayers gave up items of value in return for working conditions which led to better performing employees and higher value neighborhoods. If this requirement is to be eliminated, the taxpayers of Milwaukee should be allowed to secure something of value in return. To proceed unilaterally on such a matter would be an act of profound fiscal recklessness within a larger economic and budgetary context that demands the exact opposite of all elected representatives.

Finally, at stake here is more than just the school system's bottom line - and each taxpayer's incremental stake in it. At stake is the single largest investment most Americans will ever make in their lifetimes - their homes. MPS employees make more, on average, than Milwaukee residents as a whole. The long-term effect of large numbers of them selling their homes can only be negative for the thousands of remaining Milwaukee homeowners - and, subsequently, of course, for the government services their taxes must fund.

For these reasons, we urge you to vote in opposition to AB 44 and the provision in this proposed budget that repeals the MPS residency requirement.

Thank you for the thoughtful deliberation we know you will provide on behalf of the taxpayers of Milwaukee and the students enrolled in our public schools.

Respectfully yours,



President Willie L. Hines, Jr.



Mayor Tom Barrett



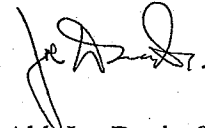
Ald. Michael Murphy



Ald. Ashanti Hamilton



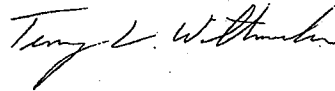
Ald. Nik Kovac



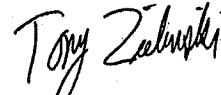
Ald. Joe Davis, Sr.



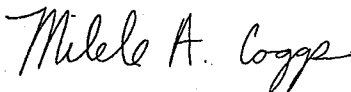
Ald. Robert J. Bauman



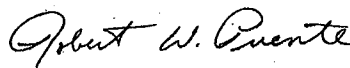
Ald. Terry Witkowski



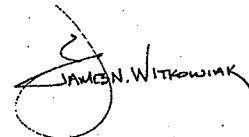
Ald. Tony Zielinski



Ald. Milele A. Coggs



Ald. Robert Puente



Ald. Jim Witkowiak



Ald. Willie C. Wade